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HOUSE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The right to vote is one of the most fundamental rights afforded to American citizens; and

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WHEREAS, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. proclaimed "The denial of this sacred right is a tragic betrayal of the highest mandates of our democratic traditions and it is democracy turned upside down"; and

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WHEREAS, Despite receiving the right to equal protection under the law with the Fourteenth Amendment and the right to vote with the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, ratified in 1868 and 1870, respectively, African Americans in the country's southern states were routinely intimidated, harassed, and assaulted when they tried to register to vote; and

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WHEREAS, On May 17, 1957, in the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, nearly 25,000 demonstrators gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. to urge the federal government to stand by the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision declaring segregation in public schools to be unconstitutional; it was at the Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom that a young civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., called for voting rights for African Americans in

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1 his Give Us The Ballot speech, launching the issue to national
2 attention and introducing Dr. King as the pre-eminent national
3 leader of the civil rights movement; and

4 WHEREAS, While the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 ended
5 segregation in public places and ended discrimination on the
6 job, it did not abolish "voter qualification" and thus did not
7 curb the use of literacy tests, poll taxes, economic
8 retaliation, repression from authorities, and physical
9 violence against African-American voters; and

10 WHEREAS, In 1964, many demonstrations were held demanding
11 voting rights for African Americans, often accompanied by
12 considerable violence against non-violent protesters, bringing
13 renewed attention to the issue of the constitutionally
14 guaranteed right to vote; and

15 WHEREAS, On February 18, 1965, while participating in a
16 peaceful voting rights march in Marion, Alabama, Jimmie Lee
17 Jackson, an unarmed voting-rights protestor, was beaten by
18 Alabama state troopers and fatally shot by a state trooper; the
19 tragedy inspired a march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama to
20 bring the issue of voting rights to Governor George Wallace's
21 front door; and

22 WHEREAS, On March 7, 1965, a peaceful demonstrators

1 attempted to march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, only for
2 participants to be attacked at the Edmund Pettus Bridge by
3 state troopers with billy clubs and tear gas; and

4 WHEREAS, On March 9, 1965, after a second march attempt,
5 civil rights activist James Reeb, a white Unitarian minister
6 from Boston who had come to Selma with many other clergy and
7 sympathizers from around the country, was beaten to death,
8 bringing national calls for voting rights and inspiring
9 President Lyndon B. Johnson to take action; and

10 WHEREAS, President Johnson called for the Voting Rights Act
11 in front of a joint session of Congress on March 15, 1965,
12 invoking the words of the protestors as he declared, "We shall
13 overcome"; and

14 WHEREAS, Congressman John Lewis of Georgia's 5th
15 Congressional district was pivotal in the success of the Civil
16 Rights Movement and continues to lead this country as a member
17 of the United States House of Representatives; and

18 WHEREAS, The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was introduced in
19 the U.S. Senate as S.1564 by Republican Sen. Everett Dirksen of
20 Illinois and Democratic Sen. Mike Mansfield of Montana on March
21 17, 1965; and

1 WHEREAS, On March 21, 1965, protected by 2,000 soldiers of
2 the U.S. Army, 1,900 members of the Alabama National Guard
3 under federal command, and FBI agents and federal marshals,
4 8,000 people began the 54-mile journey along U.S. Route 80 from
5 Selma to Montgomery; and

6 WHEREAS, On March 25, 1965, 25,000 people completed the
7 march at the steps of the Alabama State Capitol Building; and

8 WHEREAS, The Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed the U.S.
9 Senate on May 26, 1965, and passed the House of Representatives
10 on July 9, 1965, and was signed into law by President Johnson
11 on August 6, 1965; and

12 WHEREAS, The fight for civil rights continues throughout
13 the nation today; therefore, be it

14 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
15 NINETY-NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that we
16 recognize the 50th Anniversary of the Voting Rights Act of 1965
17 on August 6, 2015; and be it further

18 RESOLVED, That the State of Illinois honors all of the
19 individuals and organizations that helped fight for and pass
20 this legislation, as well as the memories of those who died in
21 peaceful protests for their right to vote.